

Le Musée à l'ère de l'informatique The Museum in an Era of Mass Communication

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LE MUSÉE A L'ÈRE DE L'INFORMATIQUE

Considéré pendant plusieurs générations comme un lieu clos, privilégié et réservé à une élite, le musée, dans la société moderne, apparaît comme une des nécessités de la vie. La fréquentation des musées se généralise; de par le monde, le grand public vient y chercher sa part de connaissances, et certaines grandes expositions attirent des assistances records.

A première vue, on pourrait croire que ces institutions ont opéré de profonds changements. En réalité, leur utilisation grandissante résulte plutôt d'une meilleure définition de leur vocation et de leur souci de fournir une information plus complète. Voué à l'échange et à la communication par le biais de l'oeuvre d'art, le musée est un carrefour où les rencontres s'organisent autour du fait artistique, qu'il soit traditionnel ou contemporain. Le consommateur du 20^e siècle est aussi friand de biens culturels et, comme il a un éventail très varié d'activités artistiques et culturelles, il n'a que l'embarras du choix et peut y puiser à sa guise.

Pour être pleinement efficace, le musée doit pourtant faire plus. Et c'est sa pierre de touche. Il doit s'inquiéter des courants de la pensée contemporaine qui sous-tendent l'expression artistique; élaguer le fouilli des expériences et retenir ce qui semble le plus cohérent, le plus significatif; rendre le phénomène de la constante remise en question des données de la culture et présenter au public, non pas un bilan, mais une actualisation des incertitudes et des contradictions dans lesquelles se débat l'artiste de notre époque.

La réouverture du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, vivement attendue, équivaut à un nouveau départ¹. Et cela sur plusieurs plans. Pendant près d'un siècle, le musée a été administré au moyen de fonds privés dont la provenance était presque entièrement anglophone. Le noyau des collections, leur accroissement, les fonds de dotation légués au Musée, les fonds d'exploitation, à mesure que l'institution progressait, provenaient de donateurs anglophones. L'époque des subventions gouvernementales est relativement récente; elle a entraîné la transformation du conseil d'administration, des structures de l'administration et, par le fait même, de l'esprit qui présidait jusque-là aux destinées du Musée. Si l'on ne peut minimiser la force encore agissante d'un certain esprit conventionnel, sûrement animé des meilleures intentions, il est sûr qu'un sentiment nouveau s'installe et que son empreinte sera irréversible.

En 1973, une association concrète s'établissait entre le Musée et le Gouvernement du Québec. L'État se mit à combler partiellement les déficits d'exploitation. En retour, des représentants du gouvernement vinrent siéger au conseil. Le Musée est actuellement dirigé par un conseil de vingt-sept membres dont douze sont nommés par le Gouvernement; l'exécutif comprend dix membres, dont quatre sont choisis par les administrateurs nommés par le Gouvernement. Les Francophones ont bénéficié de cette situation; sur les vingt-sept membres du conseil, il y a maintenant quinze Francophones; au comité exécutif, il y en a six. De même, des Francophones font partie des comités de consultation et d'aide bénévole qui travaillent avec le comité exécutif et la régie interne à la solution de problèmes concernant le fonctionnement du Musée.

L'influence de l'élément français se fait aussi sentir dans la régie interne. Les conservateurs francophones sont de plus en plus nombreux et ils exercent un rôle indispensable. Que ce soit aux services éducatifs, à la recherche, à la conservation de l'art canadien, de l'art islamique, leur présence est à la fois active et efficace. Il en est de même dans le secteur des cadres, où l'on trouve des Francophones dans les services de la restauration, des publications et de la bibliothèque. Sur un personnel de bureau d'une soixantaine de personnes, plus de la moitié, à tous les échelons, sont francophones. Le français est indifféremment la langue de travail interne puisque tous les cadres, à deux ou trois exceptions près, ont une bonne connaissance de cette langue. Il va de soi que le bilinguisme est de rigueur pour tout ce qui constitue l'image graphique du musée; l'affichage, les textes explicatifs et les légendes, la publicité et les publications.

Si j'insiste sur ces données, c'est afin de souligner les efforts réels qui se font en vue de corriger certaines singularités fréquemment dénoncées par la critique. Un processus de transformation est en cours au Musée, qui tient compte des réalités et des besoins actuels. Il ne doit pas nous faire perdre de vue, cependant, les nécessités premières d'un musée d'art: mettre les oeuvres en valeur, les faire voir, faciliter leur compréhension. A l'âge de l'informatique et de la communication, le Musée, par ses services d'éducation et de vulgarisation, assure une présence vivante dans la collectivité culturelle.

1) En 1971, *Vie des Arts* a consacré un cahier aux musées du Québec (Vol. XVI, No 63). On y trouvera, aux pages 17-18 et 20-27, deux articles sur ce musée: *Historique de quelques musées du Québec* par Jules Bazin et *Le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal* par David Giles Carter.

THE MUSEUM IN AN ERA OF MASS COMMUNICATION

By Andrée PARADIS

Considered for several generations a closed, privileged place reserved for an elite, the museum has become one of the necessities of life in modern society. Attendance at museums is spreading; all over the world, the public at large comes to it to seek its share of knowledge, and some larger exhibitions attract record attendance.

At first sight, one might think that these institutions have effected profound changes. In reality, their growing use results rather from a better definition of their purpose and their concern for supplying more complete information. Dedicated to exchange and communication through the expedient of the work of art, the museum is a cross-roads where encounters are organized around the artistic fact, whether it be traditional or contemporary. The twentieth century consumer is also hungry for cultural wealth and, as he has a much-varied scope of artistic and cultural activities, he has only an embarrassment of riches and can draw from it to his heart's content.

To be fully effective, the museum ought, nevertheless, to do more. And here lies its touchstone. It must concern itself with the currents of contemporary thought that underlie artistic expression; curtail the mass of experiments and retain what seems to be the most coherent and significant; make perceptible the phenomenon of the constant questioning of the data of culture, and present to the public, not a balance-sheet, but a realistic portrayal of the uncertainties and contradictions under which the artist of our era struggles.

The eagerly awaited reopening of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is equivalent to a new departure in several ways¹. For almost a century, the Museum was administered through private funds almost entirely contributed by Anglophones. The nucleus of the collections, their increase, the financial endowments bequeathed to the Museum, the funds for running expenses, came from the Anglophone donors as the institution progressed.

The period of government grants is relatively recent; it has involved the transformation of the administrative council, of the administration structures and, by the fact of its existence, of the spirit which prevailed up to that point in the destiny of the Museum. If one cannot reduce the still active force of a certain conventional spirit surely animated by the best intentions, it is sure that a new feeling is taking hold and that its effect will be irreversible.

In 1973 a firm association was established between the Museum and the government of Quebec. The State began to partially make good the deficits in running expenses. In return, representatives of the government sat on the council. The Museum is presently directed by a council of twenty-seven members, twelve of whom are named by the government; the executive numbers ten members, four of whom are chosen by the administrators named by the government. Francophones have benefited by this situation; of the twenty-seven members of the council, fifteen are now Francophones; on the executive committee, there are six. Also, Francophones are part of the committees on consulting and volunteer aid that work with the executive board and the internal management

on the solution of problems concerning the functioning of the Museum.

The influence of the French element also makes itself felt in internal management. Francophone curators are more and more numerous and they play an indispensable rôle. Whether in educational services, research, conservation of Canadian art, or of Islamic art, their presence is both active and effective. The same holds true in the area of managerial staff, where Francophones are found in the restoration, publication and library services. Out of an office personnel of about sixty, more than half, at all levels, are Francophones. French is equally the language of inside work, since all levels of management, with only two or three exceptions, have a good knowledge of this language. It goes without saying that bilingualism is obligatory in everything that makes up the graphic image of the museum: displays, explanatory texts and captions, publicity and publications.

If I emphasize these facts, it is in order to lay stress on the real efforts that are being made with a view to correcting certain peculiarities often denounced by critics. A process of transformation is going on at the Museum which recognizes present realities and needs. It must not, however, lead us to lose sight of the primary necessities of an art museum: to show works to advantage, to display them, to promote an understanding of them. In the age of communication and exchange, through its educational services and popularization, the Museum ensures a living presence in the cultural community.

1. In 1971, *Vie des Arts* devoted a section to Quebec's museums (Vol. XVI, No. 63). Two articles on this museum are to be found on pages 17-18 and 20-27: *Historique de quelques musées du Québec* by Jules Bazin and *Le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal* by David Giles Carter.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

THE MUSEUM'S PERMANENT COLLECTIONS: A PASSAGE - WAY OF DISCOVERY

By David GILES CARTER

Needs speak of policies and the conduct of policies, in turn, fuels needs. Material changes in the Museum are consequences of needs felt, needs articulated, and needs met.

Policies often are properly inherited, bespeaking the continuity of 116 years of activity and the motivation of generations of concerned people. Even amid the dramatic changes imposed by the present generation, one is reminded that strands of a permanent character stem from a wish to exhibit and then to collect. The need to interpret and to make known exhibits and collections in their full context was to follow in the manner of a corollary to an axiom.

The coalescent aesthetic forces which produced a gallery on Phillips Square could not have known or visualized more than a fraction of the needs which have led to a new solution in 1976. From a seemingly modest building designed to serve artists and public with an annual exhibition and to accommodate a small permanent collection of paintings, the Museum passed through the physical transitions first of expansion then of abandonment of the galleries on Phillips Square; construction of a new building on Sherbrooke Street in 1912; addition of the Norton wing of six galleries in 1939; the renovation of 1965-66; and now, renovation and

expansion of facilities to a plant twice the size of the aggregate structures of 1912-1939. Today's plant has environmental controls, flexibility of installation, and security features unknown to architects who thought of museums as public temples of elegant proportion capped with skylights and the latest in gas illumination. To-day's physical facilities must reflect the necessity to cope with virtually non-stop exhibition schedules and installation of thousands upon thousands of items belonging to the permanent collections.

This new architectural shell holds additional promise for the fulfillment of needs of Canadians and, more specifically, of Quebecers and Montrealers, as does the Museum's continued participation in the Maison Du Calvet and the Museum's merger with the McCord Museum.

Fred Lebensold of ARCOP has presented a building in which objets and pictures may be expected to speak for themselves; he has been assisted in this by Laurent Marquart of Jacques Guillon Design, responsible for a new system of museum graphics and an innovative exhibit system. Indeed, it is anticipated that public receptivity to his environment will result in a new mode of museum use by visitors.

The contents of the Museum need clarity and coherence in presentation as well as sensitive display. Climate posed severe problems regarding lighting and heating. Incandescent lighting, with accents of natural light introduced at judicious points, provides flexible and varied solutions: The architecture allows unusual patterns of circulation; these permit a chronological presentation where desirable along with extraordinary vistas and perspectives. Prints and drawings have specially designed facilities. Information about the collections is provided through a brochure, a guide, didactic panels, and oral aids; the maximum effort has been made to provide accurate data with clarity and a sense of their proper importance. An orientation centre is of material benefit as a preparation for a visit.

To weigh the collections as a chemist would weigh elements is misleading. Canadian collections begin with the earliest art of Quebec and continue with works of the present day. From Western civilizations, the Museum starts with the earliest art of the Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East to art of the present time. Asia, Africa and the Americas are represented in varying degree. Sculpture, ceramics, and textiles to-day are among the strengths of a Museum which began as a picture gallery.

Museum collections are the consequence of generations of effort. One may, as in the case of a mature private collector, distinguish that as growth proceeds, the objectives of the collection become further defined and the choice is made with greater knowledge and connoisseurship. The founding fathers were exceedingly modest in their expectations. Benaiah Gibb and James Ross made bequests which set an example for the community. These were followed by massive bequests from the estates of Learmont, Angus, Lord Strathcona and Miss Adaline Van Horne. Such bequests, made up to 1949, have been followed by donations from the Morrice, Ballantyne and Vaughan families. Anonymous donors have given the Museum over three hundred pieces of Canadian glass during the past two years, substantially filling a long-standing lacuna.

That such gifts should happen to-day must recognize a change in policy in 1916 when F. Cleveland Morgan, a new trustee, convinced the board to extend the Museum's collecting activities so as to include decorative arts. Hundreds of items in the collection were donated by Mr.